

The Beach: a Great Spot for Fun, Sun, and ...Extinction?

One of the best places to be during the summer is on the beach. The sun, warm sand and water are just a few of the things that draw people there. Even more than that, the beach is a fantastic location for recreational activities.



Photo by Cindy Gray, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

But what if you learned that some of your favorite activities could cause a bird to die and in some cases, lead to violations of federal law?

The Western Snowy Plover is a petite shorebird which builds its nests on the beach by digging small depressions in the sand and lining the hole with debris, pebbles, shells and bone fragments. It is native to the Western United States, including California, Oregon, and Washington, and to Mexico, within 50 miles of the shoreline. For more details about the Snowy Plover, click [here](#) and

[here](#).

Some activities that may negatively affect the Western Snowy Plover's habitat when carried out on or near their nesting areas are:

- Walking a dog on the beach with or without a leash
- Playing catch
- Riding ATVs on the beach
- Having a picnic
- Playing beach volleyball
- Riding bikes in the sand on the beach
- Building sandcastles
- Horseback riding on the beach
- Playing football
- Having a bon fire on the beach
- Flying kites
- Throwing the Frisbee around



Western Snowy Plover. Photo by Cindy Gray, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

This remarkably cute little bird is also protected by two federal laws: the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Under the [Endangered Species Act](#), the Western Snowy Plover is listed as a "[threatened species](#)". This means it is likely to become an endangered species soon, which in turn means it may become extinct soon after that, if something doesn't change. To learn more about endangered and threatened species [click here](#).



Can you find the Western Snowy Plover in this picture? Photo by Cindy Gray, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Beachgoers should be aware of the Endangered Species Act as it relates to the Western Snowy Plover because it prohibits the removal of listed species from their natural habitat. It also prohibits malicious damage or destruction of listed species. Violation of the Endangered Species Act could lead to [criminal penalties](#) of up to a \$50,000 fine and imprisonment of not more than a year.

The [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) also gives federal protection to the Western Snowy Plover. To see the list of birds protected by this act, click [here](#). Beachgoers should be aware of this law because it goes further than the Endangered Species Act, by protecting the bird, any part of the bird, the nest and any bird eggs. A violation of this law could be as simple as picking up a Western Snowy Plover feather found on the beach and taking it home or doing something that results in the death of the bird, which might be any of the activities mentioned above. A violation could amount to a [criminal penalty](#) of up to a \$15,000 fine and imprisonment for up to six months.

At this point, it may seem like your beach activities are severely limited. However, that's not true. Federal, state and local authorities are doing their best to help the public recognize Western Snowy Plover habitat by putting up signs and cordoning off sections of the beach. Beachgoers can help by respecting the signs and boundaries. Furthermore, the Western Snowy Plovers may give warnings that people are too close as well. This could look something like a bird diving straight at a person's head or acting like it has a broken wing and limping on the ground near beachgoers to try and draw them away from its nest. If a beachgoer sees this type of behavior, he or she should understand that the bird is telling them they are too close and should move down the beach a ways until the Western Snowy Plover stops, which means it feels comfortable. By respecting the signs and boundaries put up by authorities and heeding the Western Snowy Plover's warnings, beachgoers can learn to share the beach with the Western Snowy Plover and still enjoy their fun recreational activities!

So when you go to the beach this summer, watch out for our little feathered friends. Their numbers are limited and they don't have any other housing options.

To report a violation, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement at www.fws.gov/pacific/lawenforcement and click on “contact us” link at the top of the page.

For questions, comments, more information or to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, please go to www.fws.gov/pacific and click on the “contact us” link at the top of the page.